SOLDIERS' TRACT ASSOCIATION, Richmond, Va. } No. 99.

7/7/22
Flowers Col.

ONE SIN;

OR,

THE DYING FATHER AND HIS SON,

BY A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.

My duties as a pastor brought me into connexion with Mr. R—, and I had frequent opportunities of meeting him. He occupied a quiet and beautiful residence, which offered a pleasing and attractive sojourn to all who were permitted to share in its hospitality. To this friendly resting-place a Christian stranger could find easy admission, and was always welcome. The eye saw nothing to offend, and the ear heard nothing to make the mind uneasy. Instead of cold courtesies and formal smiles, here was apparently, and perhaps really, the warm and genuine feeling of unaffected kindness.

But this house,—where all seemed prosperous and fair, where without was the incense of flowers, the melody of birds, and the beauty of prospect, while rich resources abounded within,—this house was soon and suddenly to be the house of mourning. The messenger of death was at the door, though unseen; he had his warrant for the owner, far as the thought of such a visitor was from him.

The calmest and most beautiful sky may have upon it a small but threatening cloud, which may soon spread itself in dreadful tempest through the heavens. So sud-

denly was the sunshine of this abode darkened by affliction and death.

I missed Mr. R— from his seat in his place of worship. He was not often absent; and I called to know the cause. I missed him the more, as it was his custom to stay a little while after the congregation was gone, and converse about the sermon. He appeared to take great interest in what had been the subject of the discourse. In hearing he seemed thoughtful and interested, and his manner was outwardly such as becomes a worshipper of the Most High God. The pride and importance of property, the ostentation of station or rank, so often painfully seen in the house of God, received no encouragement from his example. His good sense, I trust, shrank from the offensive spectacle of a poor guilty mortal approaching the infinite Majesty with idle parade, from having a little more wealth than his fellow worms of the earth. He sometimes while listening had an earnest and eager look, which would lead to an encouraging hope that he might benefit by what he heard. But how affecting and lamentable to say that here the matter seems to have ended. A degree of interest was shown; but his after history plainly proved it to be only passing and without root. Real religion is not a moment's excitement. It is a principle of holiness in the soul wrought by the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit, and will be seen in the forsaking of all sin for Christ. Sin, though as dear as the right eye, will be plucked out. The sacrifice must and will be made if there be real concern for the soul, and real love to Christ.

When I called upon Mr. R—, I found him very ill, but lying on a sofa. His large and powerful frame was reduced in a few days to great waste and weakness. He lay pale and melancholy, and, for the most part, silent; the shadow of what he had been. The ancient and withered tree when shivered by lightning excites little sympathy, but the oak in its prime, and with its bright leaves upon it, awakens regret; and it was distressing to see

one who so lately had been vigorous, a prostrate and wasting man.

From the first he was possessed with the idea that his illness was mortal, that his dreaded enemy was not far away. He was miserable; he trembled; he would have shut his eyes from the fearful vision that was before him, but it was of no use. His earthly enjoyments were gone, and he awoke as from a dream to his real situation. He saw himself as a being, not only of time, but of eternity; and perceived that this was not a thought or theory merely, but a great practical fact. He felt every hour to be hastening on the dreadful proof of its reality, and he perceived the great interest he had at stake; he had a soul to lose. Ah! who can tell the power of this fact when fully seen? Every faculty was in tumultuous motion. Thoughts, as fiery darts from the world to come, made him afraid of himself. What was to become of his soul, was now a thought there was no getting rid of. He was really an unconverted man. He had no ground of consolation. The night was upon him. Profession alone was felt to be nothing; rather, if anything, an aggravation of his case. He had made many outward offerings to God, but had held back *himself*. The sin dearest to him he had never given up. The spell of false hope vanished in a dying chamber. The artificial gilding of a name will not do for a dying man. As the eye may be blinded by the light of the sun, so the mind may be blinded by a name while we have health and strength, but it will not often do for the hour of death. Few men are really deceived then, and it is vain to try to impose upon the Judge of all, or trifle with Him by a lie. God is not mocked; "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Mr. R— got worse. I went often to see him. A deeper melancholy came over him. On my entrance he would extend his hand to me in silence. The gloom of the poor felon under sentence of death seemed to be upon him. His very eyes seemed to retire from all outward commu-

nion. He listened without replying when I urged him to repent and believe the gospel. His countenance bore the outward traces of inward conflicts. I think of his thoughts at this time as like the rolling of dark clouds upon one another in wild disorder. The chief interruptions to long intervals of silence were heavy and long sighs, approaching to a deep moan. But how could anything otherwise be looked for in such a trial, when all efforts failed to move, and where the soul was not right with God or prepared to meet him?

Mr. R— had lived many years a professor of religion. He had entertained many servants of Christ, and seemed to relish intercourse with them. But holiness is not obtained by acquaintance with holy and eminent men, as sun-beams do not permanently impart their brightness to the object they may shine upon. He knew what true godliness was. He could distinguish the false from the true, the form from the inward living spirit. But while he gave—and gave liberally of his substance—he would not give his heart. The sacrifice was there, but not himself; and no fire from heaven acknowledged it. He wanted to serve two masters. There was a secret sin, carefully concealed, which he would not give up. He loved it more than the salvation of his soul. He knew he slighted by it the agonies of the cross and the glories of redemption. He knew he exposed his soul to perdition by this sin, and that there was no escape from the holy law that condemned him. He was conscious he was not a changed man, had not passed from death unto life by the renewing of the Holy Spirit, or all sin would have been forsaken; and when he awoke fully to the truth of his awful situation, he felt overwhelmed with the calamity his sin had brought upon him. He now counted the cost of it, in prospect of the endless sufferings of the sinner who dies in his sins. Placed on the verge of mortal things, it required no effort to realize the great and alarming disclosures of revelation as to the end of the wicked. When felt as real, who shall

describe their effect on the mind? It is the wrath to come; the wrath of God revealed against all unrighteousness; a consuming fire brought into the soul. Guilt brought home to the conscience is a calamity which human speech can give no name to; but such is the infatuating power of sin, man rushes upon his ruin. Strange as it may seem, the sin that slew this unhappy man he clung to even in his illness. It was his *love of brandy* at all hours; the excitement it produced held him captive. Its power so gained upon him by habit, he got blind or reckless in regard to the sin of indulging in it, and it triumphed over him. No miser ever looked upon his gold with a more fatal enchantment than poor Mr. R— upon this cup of woe. Such is the force of sin to darken and infatuate the soul, till the terrible revolution of a dying hour forces it within the influence and light of the world to come.

Mr. R— gradually wasted away; his last hours unillumined, as it seemed, by a single ray of hope. I never heard a word from him that showed his mind was at rest. All comfort fled from him. He had read of others who had died in triumph; he had seen others die in faith, with a blessed hope of endless joy; he had read of exceeding great and precious promises, to uphold the soul in death; but none of these appeared to be his portion or privilege: his sin, it is to be feared, had ruined his soul for ever. He had read of heaven, talked of heaven, sung of heaven, and prayed with those who earnestly sought it, and went in company with them; but in death he was divided, and had no hope of their blessedness. He was, as far as man can see, the guest without the wedding garment.

As he grew worse, the sofa was exchanged for the bed; silence reigned through the chamber, and an air of oppression on every countenance. And how did the pale sufferer look, while every moment had a mighty emphasis in it, as it brought on the great crisis or change from time to eternity? There was deep silence and a gloom as if hope were extinguished, an outward appearance as though

the soul were in secret audience with the sin that slew it, shut up in company with its tormentor without power to escape from it. In this solemn silence poor Mr. R— passed into the valley and shadow of death.

O ye rich men, who give to ministers and missions, who build sanctuaries and support religious societies, and who are the pillars and ornaments of them, let the great truth come to you, that all this by itself will not do for the searching of a sick bed, or the trial of a dying hour. You must, if you would be saved, give yourself to God, the Saviour, in repentance, in faith and love, a holy living sacrifice. The most costly gifts, without this surrender. are a vain show. The true way of salvation is plain;—the humiliation of the soul in real repentance, and faith in the sacrifice of the cross, aud its fruits revealed in a holy life and conversation. Believe, then, on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;—saved from all—from every sin; for the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin. But as one spark may burn a building, so one sin indulged in, must and will destroy the soul in hell.

At the grave of poor Mr. R— there was a son, who wept at his funeral. He had watched at his side in his sickness; he had been a witness of his father's sorrows and sin; he had held his hand in the convulsive struggles of death, and saw the last look he gave on earth. This son not very long before had been near to death himself. He was given over by his physician, and from a malady brought on by the very sin that, it is to be feared, destroyed the soul of his father. But with this remembrance fresh upon him, his father's death, his own wonderful recovery, with his promises and prayers for the future, he turned again. just after he followed his father to the grave, to the same fatal sin, and not many weeks after I attended the death-bed scene of this son also, through a disease brought on again by the same sinful pract ce. I sat night after night with the son, as I had done with the father. I spoke to him, I prayed with him also. I labored to do

him good, by urging to repentance and faith in Christ. The son had just resisted the warning voice from heaven, louder than many thunders, with which the alarming providence of God had visited him in his illness. He had trifled with God's mercy and his own vows, when so lately restored to health from the brink of the grave, and his guilt was great. But he needed not any remonstrance to make him miserable. Such was his restlessness, he could hardly lie in bed. . His despondency and gloom were deep as midnight. The kind attentions of wife or daughter could not relieve him from the horrid haunting of a guilty conscience. His look was that of a terrified victim in the clutches of some monster enemy. I fear his spirit gained no relief by prayer or exhortation. Accusing thoughts of his ingratitude and guilt had apparently set in, in a strong current, and it was not long before his spirit was summoned into the presence of its Maker and Judge. Thus also passed away the son of poor Mr R.—.

Here are the triumphs and trophies of sin—of even one sin. The power of one sin, let it be what it may, whether the love of gold or the love of power, the lust of the eye or the lust of pleasure, if allowed, can force onward the soul to an endless misery, though warnings, like mountains with beacon fires, stand in their way. O reader! if one particular sin be your chief snare, tremble, and break the spell. Call on God, the Holy Spirit, to help you with all his blessed influences in the struggle. Flee to the Lord Jesus Christ for safety. Let there be no hesitation. It is a matter of life and death; eternal life or eternal death! But it is not one sin only, but all sin that must be given up in heart and practice, and this will be the desire and aim of all who by faith in Christ are truly "the sons of God;" for of all such it is said, "When He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." 1 John iii. 2, 3.